

The supply of new coins is dwindling

By Roger Boye

U.S. coinage production dropped again last year as the hoarding of "hard money" continued to wane.

Uncle Sam minted 12.1 billion coins for circulation during 1986, down nearly 18 percent from 1985 figures and the smallest total since 1977.

"With lower inflation, there's been less coin hoarding by banks and individuals," said Michael Brown, a spokesman for the United States Mint. "The same thing has happened in other countries; we're not unique."

Coinage dated 1986 has a face value of \$528 million, or about \$2 worth of new money for each U.S. citizen. Lincoln cents accounted for about four out of every five coins made last year.

Coin production peaked in 1982, when the government issued 19.5 billion pieces. The total has declined every year since then.



Some hobby pros are predicting that Uncle Sam's new uncirculated coin sets could become popular collectibles.

"I'm ordering 100 of the [uncirculated] sets," said a suburban dealer who asked that his name not be used. "The price could double in a year or two, thanks to the half dollars."

Each 1987 set costs \$7 and contains \$1.82 worth of change—two Kennedy half dollars and eight other coins. The halves could be "in demand" because no such coins will be made for circulation this year.

Future hobbyists who want to complete a collection of Kennedy half dollars will be forced to buy a 1987 coin set, which presumably could boost prices of the sets as they are traded on the hobby market.

Collectors who do not receive a government order form in the mail sometime this month can buy uncirculated coin sets for \$7 each by sending a check to the United States Mint, 10001 Aerospace Drive, Lanham, Md. 20706. There is no order limit, but mint personnel normally take up to 90 days to send the coins.